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ABSTRACT

This narrative is a construction of self as beginner, analysis of other as beginner, and a reformulation that attempts to combine and make mobile and immutable knowledge about beginning and beginners. Data were collected from: (1) 48 students in a beginning teacher education course who kept journals of their experiences; (2) student teachers' writings; (3) interviews with beginning teacher educators; and (4) the author's experiences. The paper emphasizes the beginner's feelings of aloneness, nervousness, uncertainty, lack of confidence, vulnerability, and overriding concern with planning and organizing. It notes the beginner's chronic state of experiencing unsafe interactions and sense of being judged about their competency. It describes the beginner's concern with surface structure or immediately evident details and their classification, rather than deep structure understandings. It also outlines the beginner's uncertainty about the usefulness of past schemas and uncertainty about which details are most important, which leads to a focus on all of the details. The paper also discusses the question of when people actually are beginners and proposes that people come to this world not as blank slates but with personality and talents which unfold and grow in response to their environment. (Contains 18 references.) (JDD)

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ED 367 590

Beginning Again: Making Sense and Learning the Terrain

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Beginning, Again: Making Sense and Learning the Terrain

> How lonely I feel arriving alone. although I know several people and can now see Cindy from where I sit--I came alone and remain alone. However, I feel "able" to do this. I recognize this as a point of beginning--the arrival. I have directions but not the concrete idea of arrival. At this time the emotions are at the surface. We <u>feel</u> more than know. Arrivals then are difficult times. Coming to initial meetings alone...However having experienced many beginnings before this I knew as I came this morning that there would be people to ask. I knew if I got in line and followed a clump of people, I would arrive where I needed to go (August 24, 1992).

And so I begin. The difficulty of this beginning has almost overwhelmed me, because I am both the framer and the framed in this narrative about the meaning of beginning and being a beginner. Unlike Nespor and Barylske's (1991) analysis, critique, and formulation of the use of narrative in research in teaching, I am the interviewer and the interviewee. I am both the selector and the selected. This narrative is a construction of self as beginner, analysis of other as beginner, and a reformulation that attempts to combine and make mobile and immutable knowledge about beginning and beginners for Others interested in beginning and beginners. Yet, still, it is clearly a construction of self as beginner. In this research project, I have played several roles: the role of research designer, the role of data collector, the role of interviewer and interviewed (as both the interviews became a collaborative exploration), the role of data analyst, the role of interpreter and the role of narrator. In this work, I have been both the Self and the Other that Nespor and Barylske (1991) articulate. I have never tried this before so systematically. In this study, I have my own records and memories of other beginnings. At the same time, I have attempted to collect from as many perspectives as possible comments of others who are beginning about their own feelings and experiences (see Barrell et al., 1987 for an explanation of this methodology). The resulting analysis can always be suspect. The results can always be questioned as a hermeneutic circle: where I began with a formulation of what it meant to be a beginner, collected and interpreted data in ways to support that, and then presented the original formulation. Or it can be viewed as a rigorous examination of beginning where I began by illuminating so clearly what I thought it meant to be a beginner that through out the project I was the strongest skeptic. At each step (data collection, analysis, and interpretation) I sought evidence that would cause me to reconsider and

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reformulate. I have tried to do the later, but since I have also been struggling myself with beginning, I may be self-deluded. What follows is a probing of the question what does it mean to be a beginner, to be involved in beginning as a teacher?

Data Collection

In collecting data for this study, I asked the forty-eight students in a beginning teacher education course to keep journals of their experiences both in the course and in their field observations. I have collected journals from four student teachers and three teacher interns who I supervised. I have collected short essays from twenty student teachers in the English program concerning their understanding of being a beginning teacher. I have audiotaped interviews/conversations with two colleagues who like me are in their first year at this institution.

In addition, I have collected data from my own experiences as a beginner. I have recollections of my experiences as a student teacher. I have journal entries recording my experience as a first year teacher, as a beginning graduate student teaching freshman composition for the first time, as a teacher in a junior high school. I have journal entries concerning my first year in graduate school at the University of Arizona. I have letters written to family and friends as well as journal entries about my first year teaching in Michigan. I have e-mail messages and journal entries and letters to friends and family concerning my experiences as a beginner this year.

Participants

The various participants bring a rich perspective of what it might mean to begin. Four student teachers in the study allowed me to use their journals concerning their student teaching experience. Only one of these student teachers is teaching in a formalized setting for the first time. One of the teachers taught French to English speaking students shortly leaving for an extended period of church service in Haiti. This same person spent two years in church service teaching people in Haiti. Another taught music and dancing lessons for two or three years and was the lead singer in a rock group from the time she was a sophomore in high school until this fall. Another of the students has taught word perfect seminars for about three years. Even the "beginner" was in a second student teaching experience. Her first was in teaching secondary special education students.

Of the three interns (students who have not student taught, but who will teach this year as a teacher in their own classroom while they are mentored by an experienced teacher) one is the child of a teacher and has had experience teaching writing in several settings. The other two have had various teaching experiences in

church settings. One of these interns, like those discussed by Bullough, Knowles, and Crow (1991), has an uncertain understanding of herself in the role as teacher.

The students in the preservice course include several students who are either currently teaching life skills or American heritage courses on campus. About 10 of the students are currently teaching foreign languages to people preparing for extended periods of church service in foreign countries. Several of the students have tutored or provided editing in the university's reading and writing lab. All of the students have had experience as teachers in church settings. About twenty have spent eighteen months in church service focused elusively on teaching others about the church. Several worked as junior teachers during their high school years. They taught in junior high or elementary school classes during part of the day for a year. In addition, about ten of the students have taught dancing lessons or piano lessons or other kinds of lessons focusing on teaching students a particular skill either individually or in groups. A few of the students have worked as teachers and directors at summer camps designed specifically for at-risk inner city adolescents.

Both of my colleagues who I interviewed for this study have taught before. One has been in teacher education since 1969 and had full professor status at the university she left. The other is a recent graduate. In fact she finished her dissertation this fall. This is her first official position as a teacher educator. However, she taught courses during her PhD program. She had complete responsibility for the initial field component for a fifth year program for a cohort of students. She also taught math for more than five years in junior high and high school. She did not move to this location. She commutes each day from a nearby community from her home of about twenty years.

Data Consideration

In contemplating this analysis, I find myself vulnerable, apprehensive, yet hopeful, unsure of what is salient and unsure of meaning: I am a beginner both in this institution and in attempting to use methodology in this way. For this investigation what I have constantly struggled with is making sense of what is it like to begin as a teacher or teacher educator and at the same time I have been intensely experiencing the repercussions of being a beginner. I have spent the year not just beginning, but struggling with how to represent that beginning. As the quote which began this article suggests, I have been trying to "feel" and "see" what this experience is like at the same time that I have been "feeling" and "seeing" as a result of being a beginner. When I say, "We (meaning beginners) feel more than we know." I am the one feeling and unsure of what I

know.

I have been constantly concerned with how and in what ways this beginning as a teacher was like the many other beginnings as a teacher I had experienced. It became a strange sort of combinational dichotomy because I found myself in the roles of expert novice as well as the roles of expert and novice. Which was evident on the first day and revealed in the introductory quote. I talk of "recognizing that this is the arrival." However, even though I do recognize this I still feel alone. Another example, emerges in an interview with a colleague of mine who is beginning at this institution with me and yet has been in teacher education since 1969 (note I am the interviewer in the transcript I am quoting from):

> Great, except what you said is that you wanted to be able to hop in and have your life be the same efficient person that you were... I am saying that I had decided, that I knew it took me three years to begin to get things in place when I was at WMU. That is why it was really hard to come. On the one hand I was kind of being driven out by things that were happening in the department. On the other hand, things were just beginning to flower. I knew that my going would mean that many of those things maybe wouldn't flower.... So in coming here one of the things that I really decided was that I would not be so driven. That I would recognize that your first year in a place is a place when you just have to get oriented. You need to take the advantages that come, but that you did not have to be driven about doing everything (12/92).

What this quote reveals is some of the personal problems of this beginning for me. I had moved to this new institution partially because of difficulties at the institution I left and partly because I wanted to come. I understood a lot about being a beginner. I understood that it took time for things to develop the way that I wanted. I understood that I would need time just to figure out how things worked and what needed to be organized. I understood that things would come in time if I just took advantage of the opportunities as they arose. I understood that routines, relationships, networks of support, understandings of how things work in this context would not be there in the way they had been in the institution I had just left. But even in knowing this, I still had to live the experience and I was apprehensive that the things I chose to do would lead to later conflict.

As I struggled to make sense of beginnings, I revisited other pertinent beginnings. I thought of my own student teaching experience. I thought of how alone I felt the first day of student teaching--even though I

knew my cooperating teacher and had known her since childhood. We were beginning a new relationship and I had not only my own honor but the honor of my family to represent. I remember often during that experience sitting in the classroom at lunch and looking out the window at the Woodward building and the pep rally being conducted by my students. I felt bone tired and exhausted and I was worrying about my afternoon lessons and wondering if my lesson plans would work and if I had the energy to finish the day. I remembered clearly experiences with my students that later led to the way I would interact with other students. This fall one of those students died in a plane crash and that brought back in exquisite detail many of my experiences with him and his classmates.

I thought of myself at 20, loading all my possessions into my new Nova and driving across the Navajo Reservation to Sanders, Arizona. I recalled the times I stood on the bluff overlooking Sanders and looking out over that vast array of land and feeling lonely, alone, inadequate, and overwhelmed. I recalled driving an almost unconscious student fifty miles to an emergency room in Gallup and waiting with her in an examining room--A pool of blood underneath the spot where the stirrups used for pelvic exams would have extended a patient and thought of the woman who we saw being carried out of the room just before we entered. I remember listening to the doctor as she stitched up the wound of a patient injured in a drunken brawl in the next bed screened off from us by a curtain. I was wondering if my student would die or permanently lapse into a coma before the doctor had a chance to even look at her. I remembered the first of my students who died, Charlie Redhouse. Individual teaching events from that year represented themselves to me.

I remembered beginning at this institution as an English M.A. I recalled teaching freshman composition in a make up room where we either sat in darkness or the lighting in the room illuminated each person as if they were on stage. The mirrors reflected across the room giving an eerie feeling of an eternity of students sitting waiting to be taught. I remember feeling out of step, unsure, stupid and like the skeleton in everyone's closet as I attended the graduate student teaching seminars each week.

I remember my first year teaching at Tuttle Junior High in Crawfordsville, Indiana. I remember realizing that as a newcomer on a faculty who had been together for at least 10 years, that five years from now, they might also still consider me the beginner. I remember being the coach of a sport I could barely play. I remember the first time I gave a student directions and pointers for making an overhead serve and my astonishment when the player delivered a correct serve. I felt overwhelmed with

trying to teach each day and still meet the immediate demands of coaching that team.

I remember beginning as a graduate student at University of Arizona--the awkwardness of trying to sort out who was who. I felt apprehensive, unsure of the knowledge I had. I felt disconnected to any of my sources of knowledge or support. I clearly recognized that the kinds of knowledge I had about students, how they came to learn, and how to figure out if they had learned as being unimportant or unusable in this arena where I was studying learning and development theories and research.

I remember my beginning at Western Michigan. Unsure that anything I had learned in any other setting would be of use or valued here. I remember my first semester and team teaching with another faculty member--trying to learn the curriculum, figure out how the work got done, understand how what we did fit with what went on elsewhere. I struggled with how to construct a life not just for me but for my family as well. I dreamed about myself as a tap dancer. I watched in nightmare my pitiful performance: I got the beat, then I began the step, then I picked up the cane, then I lost the beat, then I dropped the cane.

Therefore, as I watched myself begin and tried to account for this beginning, I watched student teachers and interns and beginning teacher education students, and colleagues. I began to question what makes an event called or labeled a beginning? What elements in an event which are labeled beginnings seem common? What elements of those events are problematic?

<u>What Makes It a Beginning?</u>

Use of the word beginning brings with it the senses of storytelling, for beginning implies that there will be a middle and an end. This is an aspect of the use of story in teacher education that Carter (1993) articulates.

Yet, as I look across the experiences of my life, beginning and closure often occur almost simultaneously and endings are often not so clearly marked as beginnings. In fact, it seems that beginnings may create endings from something that felt like it was the middle. I thought of this particularly about the experience I had just left. I was in the process of becoming a teacher educator when I decided to begin again someplace else. But was I beginning or just continuing and so is this beginning which I have labeled a beginning really a middle.

I also realize that sometimes I can be in the middle of something, suddenly recognize I am in the middle and wonder where did this begin? Endings, like graduation, create beginnings which may not be anything more than the aftermath of ending.

One of the powers of narrative work is that I get to sequence and frame the details which are experience. As Kermode (1979) suggests the narrator gets to decide what

will be present and what will be absent. Like the biographer discussed in Edel (1984), I get to select and arrange the facts. I take the lived experience of my life and remark it as meaningful or storied events selecting or marking from my telling certain things as beginnings middles and ends.

For my own experience I was marking something as a beginning that meant moving to a new location, to a different institution and starting a new position. As I thought of the others I was marking something as a beginning for them that may or may not have felt like a beginning. Student teaching or their intern teaching may have felt like the ending of their college career. The students in the introductory education course may not have felt like beginners but people in the process of completing a degree and this was just one more course. In these three situations (student teacher, intern, beginning preservice teacher), they may have seen experiences as "the first time" which I was seeing as beginnings. One of the students in the preservice course said of an initial teaching experience:

> Today in class I had my first official taste of teaching in a setting of other students studying to be teachers as well as the professors...Luckily I was assigned a term I was familiar with, Irony. But still I found myself questioning and beginning to get nervous. What if I don't really understand the concept well enough? What if I can't explain it clearly. Well, I got through the presentation. It went Okay. Amazingly, I learned a lot from that short, simple experience. I have a real fear that I will not be able to answer my students questions. I guess that's a normal feeling. I suppose all new students soon to be teachers feel paranoid that they might not be able to answer the student's questions. But I need to remember that I can prepare ahead of time and need to remain confident (E: 9/2/92).

Many of the comments made by this student in an initial, one time, on the spot, teaching experience suggest elements that I was feeling continually. It also interestingly contains the expression of the same kinds of emotions that student teachers and beginning teachers express in their experiences. But the student did fine, the experience was over and she moved quickly back into the role of student where she felt more comfortable.

I decided that my students who were for the most part taking the first course in the teacher education sequence were beginners; however, they may not have felt like beginners. To them this may have just been part of completing their degree. This is important for this work because as I looked to my students for their understanding of their feelings as they "began" as

preservice teachers. The point in time I was marking as beginning did not have all the elements of beginning I was feeling as a person beginning at a new place with a different program. In fact their beginnings may have been submerged in middles and endings depending on where they were in their academic career.

I think this may have been true as well for the student teachers who while they saw themselves as beginning teachers the experience was actually part of an ending or a continuation of their academic experience. It had boundaries around it in ways that my beginning did not. It was to end after a semester, their roles in the setting while ambiguous were focused on their enacting the role of teacher in a limited context without feeling the full force of responsibility--the experienced teacher still stood behind them. Thus, student teaching in terms of beginnings and endings has an ambiguous shape since it is both. Tabachnik, Popkewitz, and Zeichner (1979-80) have articulated the limited nature of the student teaching experience and how needs to maintain the relationships among university supervisors and cooperating teachers and student teachers directly contribute both to limitations of the experience and the undercutting the teaching of teacher educators. It may be in part that the acting link between teacher educators and public school teachers is a beginner.

In fact, the students from the seminar and the journals of my student teachers suggested that things would be different when they had a classroom of their own. In some ways, as they moved through the student teaching experience they recognized the constraints of it and the ways in which it was a limiting situation and possibly not like what they would experience as a beginning teachers.

Why Do I Feel Vulnerable?

One of the things that seems to be same across all the experiences I examined is the sense of vulnerability the entries that talk about beginning reveal. This is not a unique finding, Reichert (1992) specifically mentions the feelings of vulnerability that students in her study expressed. In, teaching there are so many ways to make what could be construed as wrong choices. When I reflect on problematic teaching experiences from my past, the thing I most clearly remember is people (the principal, the parent, fellow teachers) saying to me after they had heard about the incident, "Well, I would never do that. I don't know what I would have done, but certainly not that." In teaching, there are no absolutely for certain answers in most cases "Best" practice depends on the context, the content, the student, the event, the beliefs in that setting.

Although I had been a successful beginner several times, I felt vulnerable because I was new, because I was not sure how things worked, because I felt alone, because

I was not sure of the rules, and because I was not sure how I fit in or how people would respond. In the Guilfoyle (1991), Hamilton (1991), Placier (1991) and Pinnegar (1991) studies of their own experiences as beginning professors, they talk of problems of trust, safety, and fit. In an explanation of this one of us wrote:

> And that is the situation that we have all been in for this period of our lives. A chronic state of experiencing unsafe interactions, over and over. With colleagues, bosses, and students. How to be understood? How to understand? Being the stranger, the outsider. Being paranoid about what "they" are thinking about us, saying about us, withholding from us. Not being at home except at home, among our safe circle (12/2/92).

This quote points to our experiences as beginners being a chronic state of experiencing unsafe interactions. Part of what made the interactions unsafe was the sense of being judged about our competency based on our performance. My colleagues, my students, and I felt compelled to perform in arenas where we felt we had inadequate information about what a "correct" performance would be. We were not sure what we were "supposed" to do. We were not sure whether observers were friendly or unfriendly. This is captured by my colleague when she says:

> There's nothing to be concerned about unless, I'm still waiting for the other shoe to drop and I don't know about it. I'm continually, not continually, but when I think about, I'm plagued by the fact of my ignorance that I will offend. I don't mean I'll be kicked out of the university, I'm not concerned about that, but I think I just don't want to offend people with my ignorance or what might be perceived as maliciousness, simply because I come from a greatly different [situation] (S & E, 12/92).

She expresses a concern that unknowingly she will do something that will cause trouble. In a new, unfamiliar setting there is a concern about what are the rules, am I following the rules, who can I trust to not be offended by what I say, who believes as I do. As beginners in an institutional setting, I found myself, my colleagues, and my students concerned about the safety of their interactions. We articulated a concern about who could be trusted.

In several places, I talk of being "wary" of what will result from what I say or do. I find my student teachers and interns saying the same thing. I report a

conversation with one of them that indicates that there are real reasons for such a feeling. After one of my visits late in the semester, I ask her how things are going. She says that she always thinks they are going fine and then I come and it seems as if everything she is doing is wrong.

In my own experience, I felt a concern about making wrong decisions and causing trouble most strongly during the first days of the semester, the week student teaching applications were due, and the period when students were finalizing course requirements for graduation. During this time, students would show up at my door asking me if they could count course x for course Y, if they could count z experience as part of student teaching. I was responsible for making these decisions. No one had told me that I was responsible and I did not understand the implications of most of what they were asking. It often seemed to me as if they were speaking a foreign language. I had no record of past decisions that had been made so I was also unsure whether they had asked before and been denied or what the history of such requests were. I felt responsible without understanding the rules or knowing the history.

I was afraid of making a mistake and either getting in trouble or equally difficult for me, appearing foolish. This concern with appearing foolish and being apprehensive about that was an on going theme. It appeared earlier in the quote from one of my beginning preservice students when she express concern about presenting her concept to the class. It is also expressed by one of the student teachers when she said:

> I dislike being a beginner; I am uncomfortable feeling incompetent in something I'm doing. I know that breaking out of one's comfort zone is good--a growing experience--but it's UNCOMFORTABLE. Part of my frustration comes in knowing that the students know that I'm a beginner. Everything I do or say is suspect in their eyes (okay --not everything) because I am a beginner--"only a student teacher".

What this student indicates is the feeling that the arena is a very public one. She recognizes that she does not have the authority that even a first year teacher might have. The students know about her status and are watchful. In this context, a beginner begins in a setting where novice status is known and may be used or manipulated in negative ways.

One of the things that my colleague and I discussed was our inability to get organized, to even make a list of what needed to be done. My student teachers, interns and my reflections from my first teaching experience indicate an incredible concern with planning and organizing. On September 11 of 1972, I wrote:

> Here it is almost 12 and I can't sleep. I guess it's one of those nights when you long to be with those you love and are part of. I miss my family and I hate myself because I cannot seem to make good. But I guess I just can't jump in all over. I have so many hours of work to do. So much checking of individuals. I don't seem to fill anyone's needs even my own. I've got to spend more time preparing... I'm not studying and learning like I should. I wish I had one small success, but no! I resolve to try with everything in me for the rest of this week to put into effect all I planned on.

My vulnerability is obvious. My solution for how I feel is to work harder, to plan, to pray, to rely on the kinds of strategies (studying and learning) which had made me successful as a student. In the journals of the student teachers and interns there is the same concern with planning. They express the same view of needing to plan more, to work harder, to study and learn to somehow bring this experience under control.

Another thing reflected in this quote is the focus on being separate from family and friends. Not friendless, but apart from the networks of support I depended on during times of discouragement. Even though my student teachers were sometimes living at home or with college roommates or spouses, they expressed this same concern about support. The concern was expressed both ways not just in needing support but feeling too tired, to engulfed by the experience to provide the necessary support. Such a concern is in the narratives of beginners presented by Bullough, Knowles, and Crow (1990). I express this in the quote which began this article. Although I recognized people in the crowd and could have gone to sit by them, I was alone and I felt alone.

The disruption of networks of support and communication are a constant theme in my own thinking and writing about beginnings. The more disruption there is in these networks or the more people feel these networks have been disrupted, the more difficult the beginning experience is. My colleague who commutes still has access to the neighborhood and community support networks she has established from living in the same place for twenty years. There are changes in those relationships which come from this move, but many are still in tact. Her mother and other family members live close by. She still works with the PTA group she has for several years. On the other hand, my other colleague moved here knowing only one or two people. She left behind her home of many years and the networks of support and trust that are established with thirty years of living and serving and educating students in an area. In addition, she moved to a community with a predominate faith that is different

from her own. I was somewhere in between. While this was a move away from networks of support and trust, I had spent three years building in Michigan, I was moving closer to family and friends. While I needed to arrange day care, find doctors, find and organize a place to live, my husband and I had both been students at this institution. My mentors are still faculty members here. Many of our old friends live in this community and we were part of the predominate religious group.

One of the things that I commented on several times through out the semester in relation to faculty development seminars I attended, was the way in which treatment of me as a beginner by others was a sign of disrespect. It increased my feeling of vulnerability. I say of these seminars:

> Don't assume that because people are beginning that they are beginners...I often feel that in these seminars I am treated as a child--someone still wet behind the ears and much younger than I am. I know some things about how academics works as do most of the other people there and to ignore that is foolish. I also find that it effectively shuts down dialogue. The places to participate are so few and so straight and so token that we all are simply silent--pleasant, participate when asked, but silent about what we really know and what we could really share with each other (Nov. 23, 1992).

My colleagues and I had experience as teachers and at institutions. We knew and understood some valuable things about teaching in any arena and yet we were never asked to share our views in ways that enabled any of us to help each other with teaching or living in this institution. The directors of the seminars were the knowers and regardless of our teaching experience or life experience, I felt we were treated as novices in every aspect of our lives.

What is Salient?

One of the consistent findings of difference between the novice and the expert is that novices--beginners display a concern with surface structure or the immediately evident details and their classification. The experts were more able to draw on deep structure understandings in situations. The experts were able to make more accurate predictions with less information. In a study of teacher's knowledge of students, I found that this was problematic for beginners in several ways. In the beginning they more quickly made judgements about student performance from their interpretation of what they pointed to as salient details. The experts either attended to other signals or interpreted the details noted by the novices differently. Because the beginners, especially the student teachers, but also the first year teachers, made these judgements they found themselves unable to predict. They became unsure about which

details were most important and so there was a felt need to focus on all of the details.

Part of our vulnerability is a feeling that we have to make decisions on limited information. This is coupled with a sense of not knowing always what the information we have means.

S: I was thinking about what you were saying about your students would say to you, "Oh I am from here, I am from there." That would immediately click for you. I remember when I was in Michigan...that is how I thought of the senior faculty responding....Your geography has been pulled out from under you...If you say you're from here and you know this teacher form there then...

A: Yes, and for me it is a spatial thing as well. I actually plug those people in on that map in my head...I have no space to tie these people to. The are not tied to anything. Now they are, but it took them longer than I ever would have believed.

S: One of the things I found in experienced teachers is that they could put a lot of frameworks around a class, about a class. That is one of the things that I utterly knew I would not have here. That is some frameworks, like okay one is in Michigan, they are taking 302 that means they've had about this much course work. They are probably at least half way through their coursework. And I know that they are in P.E. and so they have learned these kinds of things....Because I have been an experienced teacher I have those frames in place. I am looking for that kind of information to ground me and I recognize that (Interview 12/92)

In this interview the speakers focus on the ways that pieces of information have saliency for decision making and for teaching. I point out that knowing a course number in the old setting communicated to me information about the students probable progression in their academic and pedagogic curriculum.

My colleague indicates how because she was a native of the area and had worked with teacher educators in that setting for a long time she was able to not just remember their names, but she also had a sense of what the schools they attended had been like. Because she had worked with people all over the state, she knew something about the educational experiences these students might have had and she actually was able to put the student on that map. This gave her lots of information about that student.

Another issue of saliency is trying to figure not just the rules but what the rules mean. We attend department meetings but we are never sure what really got said. We do not know how the politics are working, but because of our experience we know they are there. We see the responses to each other and yet we do not know what the shrug, the lifted eyebrow, the sudden silence really means.

A final issue of saliency which causes vulnerability, is that we are not sure of what the language is or what it means. In our earlier study all of us spoke of this. It created many of the unsafe and uncertain situations--we were not sure what they meant by what they said. I knew what many of the code words meant because I had been a student here, but I was not always sure that I knew. Even though I was a teacher educator and had taught at an institution elsewhere, I soon realized the coursework numbers, the abbreviations which all held meaning for my colleagues meant nothing to me. I was also only one of two qualitative researchers in this college and so the way I talked about research was very different from the language my colleagues in my department used.

I found beginners expressed concerns about being vulnerable. We talk of being nervous. We talk of being unsure. We talk of finding out on the job all kinds of things we are responsible for that we did not understand were going to be our responsibility. We have to make lots of decisions with minimum information in what feel like public arenas. We feel like we are being watched and judged in so many interactions. We bring with us expertise of sorts, but we have a hard time figuring out where what we know fits. When a person begins in a new context, they are unsure about the usefulness of past schemas. They are looking not just for information, but meaning which will create frameworks for interpretation which will make such information salient or meaningful.

<u>How does experience fit?</u>

As I was reading the journal of one of the interns I was working with, she referred to a scripture that she had been "raised on" and indicated that in her work as a teacher it was both a guidepost and a comfort. The irony to me was that it was a scripture that began echoing in my head from my first year teaching on the Navajo reservation and which I had carried around this entire year. It is:

> And if though shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if though be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws

> of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my [daughter], that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. (D & C 122: 7).

The most important realization for me in this examination of beginnings was the role of experience. After my experience teaching in a public school again in an experience like student teaching (Pinnegar, 1992) and in thinking about my own students' experiences in student teaching this year, I am struck by the ways in which student teaching is not helpful for educating teachers. As Tabachnik, Popkewitz, and Zeichner (1979-80) point out the experience itself often allows students to try out a narrow range of the experiences that will be part of their role as a teacher. Most of the role they practice is the role of the teacher as manager. Yet, as I reflected on my own experience here, I realized that in order to really learn some things simply need to be experienced.

The chasm between the time when our students leave us and enter the field as new teachers is that movement to lived experience. The student teaching has boundaries around it set by time, by the constraints imposed by the cooperating teacher, by the time of year and the curriculum that is imposed. It is often seen as the culmination of the education of an individual and not as a beginning. For this reason alone, many of the student teachers I talked to expressed in some way their feeling that it would all be different when they had complete control and they saw very clearly the ways in which they were being constrained.

When I began my second semester here, I commented as I began a class that met for three hours each day for eight weeks of a semester, that now that I had experienced the course I knew, as I had not before, that it would be over in eight weeks. I knew what this meant for organizing my life as a whole. We learn by experiencing life how to organize it. Initially we may not even be able to make a list, but as we experience our lives we begin to create categories of meaning and we begin to be able to make lists. Unless they fail in their first experience, the student teachers I work with do not experience a second semester in the same location with the same people.

It takes time to create networks of relationship and support. They do not happen overnight. They come about from interaction with others on committees, at lunch, in meetings. In addition, I also realized from an earlier study I had done (Pinnegar, 1989) that when we begin we may be wary or apprehensive, but things do not go awry initially. The difficulties emerge in time; thus, we come in apprehensive. We receive positive feedback. Things seem fine and then things fall apart.

I realized very clearly that meaning emerged as we came to understand our experience. The things we knew about a context and about teaching became embedded in the experiences we had. I was struck over and over again with the importance of experience. The lack of being able to "see" into our experience as beginners of knowing what was salient and what things meant and our own feelings of vulnerability caused us to both select and interpret the experiences we lived in ways that across our experience in the setting would have significant impact. Something I realized that I think is important for us to think about as teacher educators is that these initial experiences we have may constrain our teaching for many years, may lead us to impose limits on our practices that are false.

A favorite story of mine from the American transcendatalist movement applies here. Jones Very (a transcendatalist) was walking down the street one day and he ran into a tree. A friend said, "Jones, didn't you see that tree?" Jones replied, "I saw the tree but I did not realize it." When we begin, we may be like Jones--"see" the tree, but not realize it. My student teachers and interns reported remembering things their professors had warned them of; they recognized the experience now, but they were unsure of how to act. I find myself in such situations sometimes using strategies, knowledge, methods that I do not agree with or do not believe in because I am so pressured by the situation the action emerges--the language emerges and I find my action to be incongruent with my belief, but unsure about what to do to make them congruent.

Was I ever a Beginner?

As I thought about the experiences of the people I had considered as beginners, I began to question exactly when any of them were beginners. My students brought with them to their first teacher education courses long experience in classrooms, as students primarily but most of them also brought experiences in teaching others. Tabachnik, Popkewitz, and Zeichner point out that learning from student teaching is narrowed and undercut because of the limited ways student teachers are allowed to take over in a classroom. Teachers in their study of elementary student teaching experiences provided limits such as the daily schedule, classroom rules and management routines, as well as the content to be taught. When many teacher educators speak of the prior knowledge of their students concerning what it means to teach, they see that knowledge as problematic, not as a foundation on which to explore and build, but as a something for students to define themselves against. Clandinin (1992) and Bullough, Knowles, and Crow (1991) suggest that the personal histories and experiences of students should be a beginning point as we work to educate future teachers.

As I thought of this I began to question when was I

ever a beginner. My own personal belief is that we come to this world not as blank slates but with personality and talents which unfold and grow in response to our environment. From the very beginning of my life in this world, I believed that I had brought talents that later enabled me as a teacher. In addition, I remembered that when I first began thinking about the development of teacher schema I wrote a paper about my own schema for interacting with students in classroom settings. As I investigated the roots of that schema, I realized they were founded in an experience I had teaching a particularly difficult group of three year old's in Sunday School when I was only 16. While things I learned in teacher education and student teaching and beginning teaching had augmented and differentiated aspects of that schema, its roots were pretty clearly connected to my earlier experiences. Never in any of my educational experiences had anyone asked me to reflect on those earliest experiences. The exception to that was a research on teaching course with Walter Doyle in which our own experiences in teaching and as teachers often provided background and detail for our analysis of research on teaching.

In my work as a teacher educator, I seldom approached my beginning teacher education students either in initial coursework, as student teachers, or as interns as if they might have similar schemas rooted in such experiences. In adolescent development courses I taught in the past and in experiences here I had students write autobiographical papers exploring life experiences, but I had not thought well about the kinds of teaching experiences that might, more powerfully than anything they were learning from me, form the basis of their teacher schemas. With the current focus on constructivist learning and our desire to enable our students to use constructivist methodology, how were we engaging student knowledge and understandings in our work with them. Holt-Reynolds (1992) work indicates the difficulty of changing the conceptual understandings that students bring with them. Grossman (1992) points to sites where such changes have been made. But I wondered whether regardless of all we know about the potency about prior knowledge and our beliefs about learners, do we continue to approach our students as beginners with less knowledge or experience or understanding or wisdom than we. I wondered in what ways we circumvented the possibilities for future teaching strength by approaching our students as beginners.

Some kind of Ending

As I have explored the meaning of being a beginner and beginning, I have tried to make sense of my own beginning. Even as I have worked on this paper, I have realized the status of being a beginner on this paper. I feel tentative and unsure of the work. I am apprehensive

and fearful of the response to the product. I felt uncomfortable with the frameworks I was bringing to this analysis but was uncertain about how to use others. As I worked with the data and revisited my own beginning experiences, I felt a congruence. Yet, I was uncertain about how to embody these understandings in language. It appears to me that being a beginner brings with it certain feelings and emotions. Two of these are a pervading sense of vulnerability and an uncertainty about what things mean and how to make sense of them. It seems to me that I was confident that I had knowledge but I was uncertain where it might apply or how to use it. These feelings and emotions may limit the beginners' ability to use the expertise they have. Feeling dumb, they may act dumb. Finally, there is a chasm of lived experience between entering a new setting and being able to understand and work with that context in powerful ways. As I begin, I am wary. I should expect my students to be wary. As I end this work, I find myself puzzling still over the impact of beginning on beginners.

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